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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
22 November 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Castro's Aims Regarding the Future of  
US-Cuban Relations

1. In agreeing to permit Cubans to come to the US, Fidel Castro had both short- and long-range motives. For the short run, he is further strengthening the Communist regime in Cuba by permitting malcontents and socially non-productive elements to depart. These people were contributing little to the revolution and will not be missed. In the longer run Castro probably desires to achieve a basis for establishing a dialogue with the US which could lead toward some kind of normalization of relations.

2. Castro has expressed interest in "normalizing" relations for over two years. He may have made his refugee offer in the hopes that it would engage the US in the kind of dialogue which could lead to other limited agreements and a gradual softening of Washington's "rigid" Cuban policy. While the interview published in The New York Times on 2 November indicates that the Cuban leader does not expect a significant or immediate improvement in relations with the US, it nevertheless attributes to him the belief that the negotiations over the movement of refugees show "there are concrete problems (between the two countries) which can be solved."

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4. De facto US recognition of Castro would be a major step toward breaking out of the diplomatic isolation Cuba faces in the Western Hemisphere and, indeed, throughout the world. Castro's aims may be this limited. Remembering Washington's rebuff of his well publicized overtures in 1964, he presumably will avoid an open initiative. He might, however, offer a realistic plan for discussing such matters as the release of selected political prisoners in Cuba, a subject the US could hardly refuse to discuss.

5. Another of Castro's objectives almost certainly is the eventual easing of the US embargo on trade with Cuba and its pressures against Cuba's Free World trading partners. Cuba badly needs spare parts for its US-built industrial plants, autos, trucks, and railroad equipment and particularly its sugar refining and mining equipment. Moreover, US consumer goods are sorely missed by Cuba's urban population.

6. In short, Castro may covet the kind of treatment Washington accords most of the Eastern European Communist regimes. It is unlikely he expects--or even wants--resumption of regular diplomatic relations. He still derives considerable domestic political capital from using the US as a scapegoat for his domestic and foreign problems. In his interview of 2 November, Castro candidly admitted that he exploited the image of "US hostility" as a stimulus to spur the Cuban people. The strongly anti-US remarks he made following the exile raid in Havana harbor on 14 November illustrate this tactic.

7. In return for some kind of improvement in relations, Castro would probably continue his present tactic of avoiding confrontations with the US. It may be significant that for the past year Cuba has carefully avoided incidents which could trigger such a confrontation, perhaps to lay the groundwork for a limited improvement in relations. Noticeably, threats to shoot down US reconnaissance planes and incidents at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay have been absent since the fall of 1964. Nor has Cuba undertaken major propaganda offensives against the US--at the UN or in other international forums--for about the last year.

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8. Moreover, there are indications that the Cubans have slackened their subversive efforts in Latin America. For whatever reason, Havana is more cautious in supporting insurgent groups than it was last year, and certainly more so than in 1962 and 1963. Propaganda intensity has lessened and the Cubans no longer provide funds or training to insurgent groups in Colombia and Peru--countries considered high on Havana's subversion list. It is still too early to be able to say precisely what Castro's motivations are in this regard or whether he has made only a minor tactical shift subject to reversal six months hence. He is aware, however, that one of the US demands for "normalization of relations" is that he end his policy of "export of revolution." While he might be willing to play down Cuban support of Latin American "national liberation movements," he could hardly admit publicly to such a move.

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10. In general, Castro now seeks to project an image on the international scene--and increasingly on the domestic scene--of a national leader conscientiously trying to solve Cuba's domestic problems. Contrary to popular misconception, most of Castro's plays in the international arena are carefully thought out in advance. History has shown that his moves against the US generally have been calculated on the basis of expected US responses. Castro is shrewd enough to know that the US could hardly have avoided agreeing to discuss his offer so shortly after passage of the new US immigration bill. If the negotiations had failed, of course, Castro would have had an unparalleled propaganda opportunity to belabor the US. However, in this case it appears that Castro wanted his initiative to succeed.

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[redacted] Cuban officials went out of their way to assist the small boat owners who called at Camarioca to pick up Cubans wishing to emigrate.

11. In summary, Castro's hidden purpose behind the refugee offer may have been part of a larger design aimed at laying the groundwork for a gradual improvement of relations with the US. Castro probably is not clear in his own mind about the final form "normalization of relations" should take, but his agreement on the refugee issue represents the first step in that direction.

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CASTRO'S AIMS REGARDING THE FUTURE  
OF US-CUBAN RELATIONS

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE  
Office of Current Intelligence

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